

Bruce Caputo: Advice and Dissent

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WASHINGTON — The way it usually goes, a freshman in Congress is paid little mind, but the usual way has not been the path for Representative Bruce F. Caputo of Westchester County. Instead, right off the bat, the moderate Republican has become not only the object of attention, but also the object of invective.

This is because of his work—viewed by some as being much too zealous—on the House investigation into alleged payoffs by Korean nationals to Congressmen and other Federal officials.

Mr. Caputo, who represents Westchester and part of the north Bronx, is articulate and does his homework. He leaves no doubt that he aspires to higher office, perhaps the Senate in 1980.

With the dark-haired good looks of a movie star, and a shock of thick hair falling jauntily over his right eyebrow,

Mr. Caputo looks much younger than his 34 years. A bachelor, he enjoys the company of a number of young women. And it is no liability that he is already worth more than a quarter of a million dollars.

Sought to Speed Pace of Inquiry

Mr. Caputo, who is becoming nationally known as a result of television coverage of the Korea story, is entirely aware of the Bronx cheers, some behind his back and some to his face. They started shortly after his assignment to the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct—better known as the ethics committee—early last year.

The young Congressman quickly decided that the committee's investigative pace into the brewing Korea scandal was too slow. Mr. Caputo immediately began prodding for action.

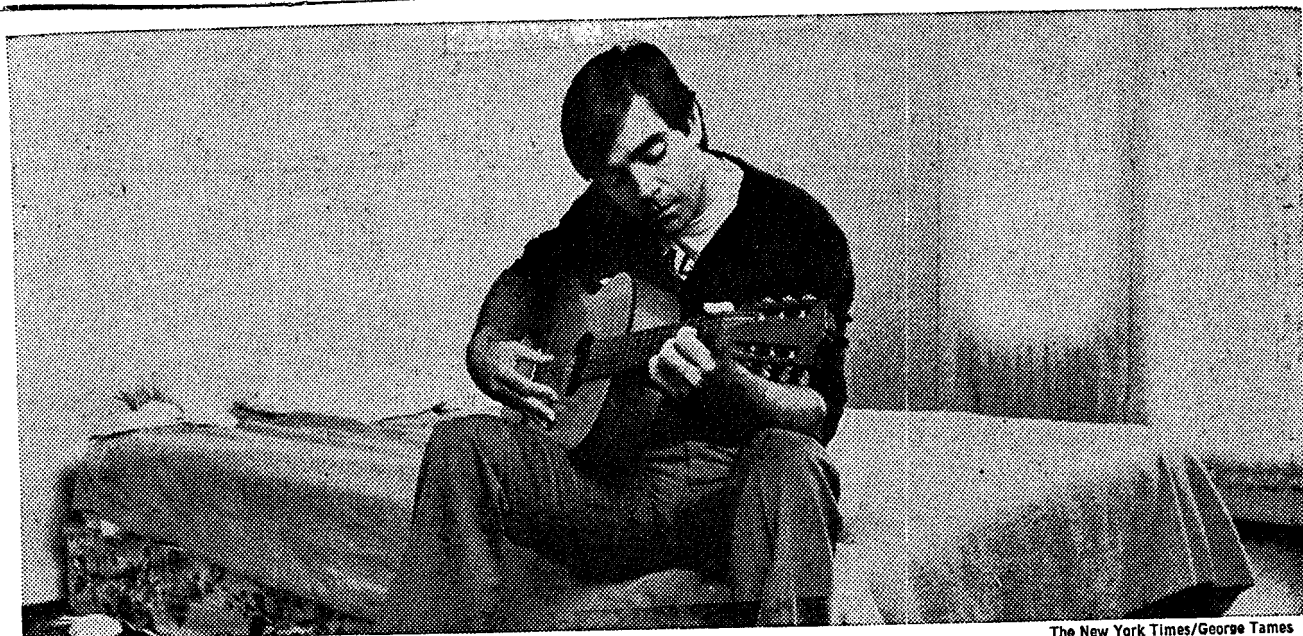
His assignment to the ethics committee was accidental. As a new Republican in a Congress controlled by

Democrats he had been edged off his first committee to allow still another Democrat to come aboard, but then he had to land somewhere. Almost as an afterthought the Congressional leadership added him to the ethics committee, headed by Representative John Flynt Jr., a 63-year-old Georgia Democrat.

Virtually from the start, Mr. Caputo clashed with Mr. Flynt, whose manner can be courtly even while his face is red with anger. Mr. Caputo, not a reticent person, pressed the committee members—many of them veterans—to sign a written oath stating that they had never received gifts or cash, amounting to more than \$100 from Korean nationals or from other foreign governments.

A number of the members were incensed at Mr. Caputo. His argument was that a committee starting out to

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Representative Bruce F. Caputo relaxing in his Washington apartment

Bruce Caputo

Bruce Caputo, Freshman on House Ethics Committee,

Offers Advice on Korean Payoffs and Stirs Dissent

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investigate a scandal should show that it had clean hands. The majority of the committee, however, saw a grandstand play by Mr. Caputo.

A spokesman for Walter Flowers, Democrat of Alabama and one of the veteran committee members, said: "Caputo has obviously seized on a publicity gimmick for himself. There are not many places where a new Republican can make a splash, and this is one of them." He was referring to the fact that Democrats have heavy majorities on all committees except the ethics committee, which by regulation is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.

The committee rejected Mr. Caputo's demand for an "oath" and agreed instead on a simple statement. In a recent interview in his Capitol Hill office

—notably devoid of any pictures or plaques on the walls and with cavernous bookcases almost totally free of books—Mr. Caputo said he had also wanted to start proceedings against "one or more who confess taking money from Korean businessman Tong-sun Park."

He said that his request was quickly voted down last year by the committee and contended that "I backed off pretty far before I dug in."

Pays for Trip to Korea

But many others thought differently. The spokesman for Mr. Flowers said that Mr. Caputo had picked an issue that touched other members personally and that the Representative tended to tarnish Congress with a broad brush.

Meanwhile, after a visit to South Korea at his own expense last December, Mr. Caputo talked about "dozens" of past and present Congressmen hav-

ing taken Korean payments or gifts. He spoke of "tens of thousands of dollars in cold cash—in \$100 and \$50 bills—changing hands." Yet, spokesmen for Mr. Flowers and other veteran members on the committee insist that, as the investigation unfolds, the number of people really involved is not going to be big at all.

Mrs. Fenwick a Supporter

Even colleagues sympathetic to Mr. Caputo's efforts to stir up a slow-moving ethics committee complain that for a long time he was rude and showed a lack of sensitivity to the feelings of others. Mr. Flynt is unflappable in discussing those closed-committee sessions from which so many rumors of sharp disputes have emerged. As Mr. Flynt laconically tells it, "I don't recall

Most of the anti-Caputo talk has come from the Democratic majority and from longtime Congressmen irked

by what they feel is a shotgun attack on innocent people.

Representative Millicent H. Fenwick, Republican of New Jersey and frequently the only ethics committee member supporting Mr. Caputo, describes him as "a very bright, smart young man who wants an honest, thorough investigation." Although she finds some of his statements "may be a little indiscreet," she dismisses charges that he could be tarnishing Congress as a whole.

"In my own view," she said, "the only thing that is going to tarnish Congress is the continuation of shenanigans involving any kind of cover-up."

Mr. Caputo indicates a frank interest in running for the Senate in 1980, whether or not Senator Jacob K. Javits seeks re-election; and the Representative does not reject talk that he could

be a candidate for Lieutenant Governor this year.

Choosing his words carefully as usual, Senator Javits said that he was not at all offended by talk of Mr. Caputo's ambitions. "I admire Bruce," he said, "because he's lively, he lays it on the line, he's honest and sincere and he's generally along the right line in exposing things to the public."

A Mattress on the Floor

The son of a prominent attorney, Anthony J. Caputo, the young Representative was educated at Harvard (a bachelor's degree, plus a master's degree in business administration) and at Georgetown University Law School. He made "more money than I'd dreamed of" in a management-consultant firm in the New York area and then went into politics, selling his stock in the firm. He was twice elected to the New York State Assembly.

Today, he lives in a cramped two-room, Capitol Hill apartment and sleeps on an innerspring mattress on the floor. An athlete who enjoys lacrosse, rugby and basketball, he jogs near the Capitol practically every day.

Colleagues in the corridors or on the basketball court of the House gymnasium warn him of retaliation against his investigative efforts or they tell him that he does not understand that everyone was taking various favors a few years ago.

So says Bruce Caputo. Recently answering the buzzers announcing a roll call on the floor of the House, he turned to a colleague hurrying with him to answer the summons and asked, "What are we voting on?" The unsmiling colleague responded, "On your expulsion."